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UNH Opens Equal Access Trail In College Woods

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DURHAM, N.H. – The University of New Hampshire's College Woods -- the university's most-used woodland property and a resource for research, recreation and instruction -- is now easier to access than ever, thanks to the completion of a mile-long equal access trail. Three years in the making, the equal access trail follows federal guidelines to allow access to a range of users, including those who use wheelchairs and other assistive devices.

"The guiding principle in this project is based upon our desire to make available the widest range of non-invasive recreational opportunities on University Woodland properties," says Stephen Eisenhaure, land use coordinator in the UNH Office of Woodlands, who led the project. He credits Sarah Smith, forest industry specialist with UNH Cooperative Extension, for the idea of enhancing the woods' accessibility.

The trail, a gently graded path that stretches nearly a mile to a scenic overlook of the Oyster River, is already one of the most popular in College Woods. Working with student technicians from UNH's Thompson School of Applied Science, Eisenhaure improved much of the trail surface with crushed stone that, in some cases, buried obstacles like large rocks or roots. Areas once muddy after storms now stay dry, thanks to culverts that divert water beneath the trail into the wetlands that surround it. Three benches, of native red cedar harvested from College Woods and milled at the UNH Sawmill, provide resting places at the top of steeper grades.

Eisenhaure notes that the goal of the project was not to "pave paradise"; rather, it aimed to make subtle changes to the woodland path that open it to the widest range of people. That wide range goes beyond wheelchair-users or those who identify themselves as having a disability: "Somebody who can't walk very far or very fast can now enjoy College Woods," he says, and anyone can appreciate not slogging across a muddy section of trail. "It really is for everybody."

Total cost of the three-year project was \$15,000. Funding for the equal access trail was contributed by the U.S. Forest Service, the UNH Parents Association, UNH Campus Recreation, and the university's Space Allocation, Repair and Renovation Committee (SARRC). In addition, the Office of Woodlands and Natural Areas contributed funds generated through timber sales on UNH woodland properties.

The equal access trail is part of a larger effort to increase recreational use of College Woods and UNH's other woodland properties. Major trail entrances to the university's most heavily used recreational properties -- including College Woods, East and West Foss Farm, Thompson Farm and MacDonald Lot in Durham and Kingman Farm in Madbury -- are now marked with

large trail maps and informational signs. These trail maps, with much greater detail and clarity than previous ones, will soon be available to download at the Office of Woodlands Web site: <http://www.unh.edu/woodlands/>.

"We want to open the woods to those who may not have used them before," Eisenhaure says. "They really are for everybody."

The equal access trail starts at the main entrance to College Woods on Colovos Road, behind the UNH Field House. From Main St. in Durham, turn onto College Road (at the lights). Turn right onto South Drive and continue under the new Southern Underpass. Take an immediate right onto Waterworks Road, which becomes Colovos Road. Parking is available at the trailhead.

For more information on College Woods, go to <http://www.unh.edu/woodlands/properties/colwoods/index.html>.

